



Offer Versus Serve

Children who are offered food choices are more likely to eat the foods they enjoy rather than throw the food away. Offer Versus Serve (OVS) is an approach to menu planning and meal service that helps Summer Meal sponsors reduce food waste and costs, while keeping the nutritional value of the meal high.

Go to [Resources](#).

How OVS Works

OVS allows children to decline some of the foods offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper at Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites. Any site, regardless of location or type of sponsor, may use OVS.

Schools that participate under the Seamless Summer Option and SFSP school sponsors that choose to use the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs meal patterns must follow the OVS requirements under 7 CFR 210(e) and 7 CFR 220.8(e). See *Updated Offer vs Serve Guidance for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

All other sponsors that choose to use OVS must follow the SFSP requirements that are outlined here. These requirements support the practice of offering a variety of food choices for children, increases the likelihood that children will select foods they prefer, reduce food waste, and ensure that children are receiving enough food to meet their nutritional needs.

Terms to Know

- A food component is one of the food groups that comprise a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper.
- A food item is a specific food offered within the food components comprising the reimbursable meal. For example, separate ½ cup servings of peaches and pears are two food items that comprise the Fruit and Vegetable component.





- A combination food contains more than one food item from different food components that cannot be separated, such as cheese pizza, which contains three food items from different food components: a serving of Grains (crust), a serving of Fruit and Vegetable (tomato sauce), and a serving of Meat and Meat Alternate (cheese). Other examples of combination foods are soups, prepared sandwiches, and burritos.

OVS at Breakfast

The SFSP meal pattern requires three food components – Fruit and Vegetable, Grains, and Milk – to be served at breakfast.

Sites that choose to use OVS at breakfast must offer the following four food items:

1. A food item from the Fruit and Vegetable component,
2. A food item from the Grains component,
3. A serving of Milk, and
4. A food item from the Meat and Meat Alternate component, or one additional food item from the Fruit and Vegetable component or Grains component.

All the food items offered must be different from each other. For example, while rice cereal and oatmeal are two types of cereals that are not identical, they are the same food item.

A child must select at least three of any of the food items offered.

If combination foods are offered, instructions or signs must be available to let site supervisors and children know what choices make up a reimbursable breakfast.

There are a variety of ways to plan a menu that meets the OVS breakfast requirements.





Here are three examples:

Four Food Items: This breakfast menu offers Muffin, Cereal, Banana, and Milk. For a reimbursable breakfast under OVS, a child may select:

- Muffin, Banana, and Milk; or
- Cereal, Banana, and Milk; or
- Muffin, Cereal, and Banana; or
- Muffin, Cereal, and Milk.

Five Food Items with a Choice of a Combination Food: This breakfast menu offers Waffle with Fruit, a combination food consisting of two food items from two food components (Waffle is a Grains component and Fruit is the Fruit and Vegetable component); Slice of Toast; Orange Slices, and Milk.

- If a child selects Waffle with Fruit (combination food), the child must take one other food item to make a reimbursable breakfast; however,
- If a child declines Waffle with Fruit, the child must take Toast, Orange Slices, and Milk to make a reimbursable breakfast.

Six Food Items with a Choice of Food Items within One Component: This breakfast menu offers Slice of Toast, Cereal, Tomato Juice, Pineapple Chunks, Mixed Berries, and Milk.

There are many combinations of food items that a child may select. For a reimbursable breakfast, a child must select three different food items, such as:

- Slice of Toast, Cereal, and Tomato juice; or
- Slice of Toast, Pineapple Chunks, and Mixed Berries; or
- Cereal, Slice of Toast, and Milk; or
- Cereal, Mixed Berries, and Milk.





OVS at Lunch or Supper

The SFSP meal pattern requires four food components – Meat and Meat Alternate, Fruit and Vegetable, Grains, and Milk – to be served at lunch or supper.

Sites that choose to use OVS at lunch or supper must offer the following five food items:

1. A food item from the Meat and Meat Alternate component,
2. A food item from the Fruit and Vegetable component,
3. Another food item from the Fruit and Vegetable component,
4. A food item from the Grains component, and
5. A serving of Milk.

All the food items offered must be different from each other. For example, while Honeycrisp slices and Granny Smith apple sauce are two types of apples that are not identical, they are the same food item.

A child must take at least three food components. This is different from OVS breakfast. While a child must select three food items at breakfast, at lunch and supper a child must take three different food components to ensure that each child receives a nutritious meal.

If combination foods, or two or more food items, such as bread and rice, from one food component are offered, site supervisors and children must be able to know what choices make up a reimbursable meal. Instructions or signs must be available.

Consider these examples:

Six Food Items with a Choice of a Combination Food: This menu offers Turkey Sandwich with Tomato Slices, a combination food consisting of three food items from three food components (sliced Turkey is a Meat and Meat Alternate component, sliced Tomato is a Fruit and Vegetable component, and Sandwich Bread is a Grains component); Crackers; Green Beans, and Milk.

- If a child selects the Turkey Sandwich with Tomato Slices, there are three components in the sandwich for a reimbursable meal; however,





- If a child declines the Turkey Sandwich with Tomato Slices, the child must take Crackers, Green Beans, and Milk to make a reimbursable meal.
- A child only needs to take one fruit or vegetable item, such as Tomato or Green Beans, to count towards the full Fruit and Vegetable component.

Six Food Items with a Choice of Food Items within One Component: This menu offers Yogurt, Roast Chicken, Rice, Broccoli, Apple Slices, and Milk.

- There are many combinations of food items that a child may select. For a reimbursable meal, a child must select at least three food items from three different components, such as:
 - Roast Chicken, Rice, and Broccoli; or
 - Yogurt, Apple Slices, and milk; or
 - Roast Chicken, Broccoli, and Milk; or
 - Yogurt, Rice, and Broccoli.
- A combination of Yogurt, Roast Chicken, and Rice would not make a reimbursable meal because the child would have selected only two food components (Yogurt and Roast Chicken are from the Meat and Meat Alternate component and Rice is a Grains component), instead of the required three components.
- A child only needs to take one fruit or vegetable item, such as Broccoli or Apple Slices, to count towards the full Fruit and Vegetable component.

Seven Food Items with a Choice of a Combination Food: This menu offers Pasta with Marinara Sauce, a combination food consisting of two food items from two food components (Pasta is a Grains component and Marinara Sauce is a Fruit and Vegetable component); Carrot and Raisin Salad, a combination food consisting of two food items from the Fruit and Vegetable component; Steamed Peas; Cheese Sticks, and Milk.

- For a reimbursable meal, a child who selects the Pasta with Marinara Sauce must take at least one other food component, such as Cheese Sticks from the Meat and Meat Alternate component or Milk.





- If a child takes the Carrot and Raisin Salad, at least two other food components, such as Cheese Sticks from the Meat and Meat Alternate component and Milk must be selected for a reimbursable meal.
- A child may decline both combination foods and take Steamed Peas, Cheese Sticks, and Milk for a reimbursable meal.
- Although a meal of Pasta with Marinara Sauce and Carrot and Raisin Salad consists of a combination of food items, the meal is not reimbursable because it offers only two food components (Pasta is a Grains component and Marinara Sauce and Carrot and Raisin Salad are food items from the Fruit and Vegetable component);

Resources

USDA

- *7 CFR 225.16, Meal service requirements*
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d87b1089e455f65409bd1dbf463b3686&node=pt7.4.225&rgn=div5%20-%20se7.4.225_116#se7.4.225_116
- *Updated Offer vs Serve Guidance for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>
- *SP 05-2016, SFSP 05-2016: Meal Service Requirements in the Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/meal-service-requirements-summer-meal-programs-questions-and-answers>
- *Nutrition Guidance*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NutritionGuide.pdf>
- *Best Practices: Meal Service*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/best-practices-meal-service>





- *Summer Meals Toolkit*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>
 - *Congregate Meals*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Congregate_Meals.pdf
 - *Family Style Meals*
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-OVS.pdf>
 - *Leftover Meals*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Leftover_Meals.pdf
 - *Meal Service Times*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Meal_Times.pdf
 - *Serving Adults*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Adult_Meals.pdf
- Team Nutrition Healthy Meals Resource System
Feeding Environment and General Resources
<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/cacfp-wellness-resources-child-care-providers/feeding-environment/feeding-environment>

Institute of Child Nutrition

- *The Basic Guide to Family Style Dining - Part 1*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20130815085751.pdf>
- *Planning and Preparing: Family Style Dining - Part 2*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20131004114651.pdf>
- *Happy Meal Times with Family Style Meals*
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100917032729.pdf>





For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and compatible with your Program. For additional questions, sponsors and the general public should contact their State agency for help. State agencies should contact their Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Office.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

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